

1997

# An Analysis of Parental Involvement at IEP Conferences for Students with Hearing Impairments

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**An Analysis of Parental Involvement  
at IEP Conferences for Students  
with Hearing Impairments**

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**July 31, 1997**



## **Abstract**

Legislation of the 1970's and 80's mandated parental involvement in the development of special education plans for children with disabilities. The literature has indicated that parents are often passive recipients of information (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980) even though parent involvement in a child's education has been associated with academic success (Epstein, 1990). An observational analysis of eighteen IEP conferences for children with hearing impairments receiving services through the Eastern Illinois Area Special Education Cooperative was completed. Observers recorded the frequency of verbal participation by the parents, and parents and teachers completed questionnaires addressing satisfaction and perceptions of involvement following the meeting. Relationships among parent variables, levels of verbal participation, parent ratings of satisfaction, and teacher ratings of parent involvement were analyzed using Pearson correlational data. Results indicate that for the population observed, parent satisfaction levels were high regardless of verbal participation levels. The length and size of the meetings as well as the age of the child were associated with parent satisfaction ratings. Parent levels of verbal participation ranged from 31 to 81 percent, and appear to be higher than ratings reported in previous observational studies (Turnbull & Hughes, 1987). Levels of verbal participation were not significantly correlated with measures of parent satisfaction, nor with teacher perceptions of parental involvement. Three main trends were indicated by the results obtained: 1) The number of participants at meetings was associated with the length of the meeting; 2) longer meetings were associated with lower percentages of verbal participation from parents; and 3) reports of active parental preparation prior to the IEP meeting was associated with higher teacher ratings of parental involvement. Limitations of the study include a small sample size, a limited variety of subjects (mostly married white women with high school or higher education levels), and

vague parental responses to open ended questions. Further research regarding parental participation for the hearing impaired as well as other populations is encouraged.

**Approval for this study was obtained on April 15, 1996.**

### **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to Bill and Bobbi Kroeker and Rob Parker for all of your love, support, and encouragement. My committee - Dr. Mc Cormick, Dr. Leal, and Mrs. Martone, thanks for your help and your patience! To Dr. Mc Cormick, an extra thanks for going above and beyond the call of duty for a thesis chair. Thank you also to the parents and teachers who contributed to this study.

## **Table of Contents**

1. Abstract
2. Introduction and literature review
3. Purpose of study
4. Definitions and hypotheses
5. Method
6. Results
7. Discussion
8. Limitations of current study
9. References
10. Appendix A
11. Appendix B
12. Appendix C

## **List of Tables and Figures**

Table 1 Correlational Matrix

Table 2 Frequencies of teacher agreement ratings.

### **An Analysis of Parental Involvement at IEP Conferences**

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), provides children with disabilities with greater educational opportunities, requires the formation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and mandates parental involvement in the determination of services for a child. Researchers have examined the plethora of influences upon children's learning from genetic endowments to a teacher's instructional style (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990). Parent involvement in a child's education has been reported repeatedly as a highly influential factor contributing to academic success. Other studies have examined the parent-school relationship in regard to frequency of communication with the child's teacher, and voluntary participation in school activities (Epstein 1990). Epstein (1990) states "if schools and families combined all available resources to provide students with varied, intensive, and coordinated learning opportunities ... with productive overlap, more students would know that their teachers and parents are working together to help them set and reach important goals," (p. 101).

Public Law 94-142 and the mandated development of the IEP resulted from civil rights influences, and the political climate of the seventies. Goodman and Bond (1993) describe the development of this legislation as a response to "advocates for individuals with disabilities .. urging still more accountability out of deep frustration over inadequate and ineffective education," (p. 411). Parent involvement was key to the movement behind the IEP legislature. Prior to 94-142 parents had to advocate individually for the rights of their children. Fine (1993) argues that the current fight for the rights of the children again falls upon the parents. Current reforms to education including the Regular Education Initiative (REI) challenge educators to serve the needs of a diverse population of students in the most appropriate, least restrictive environment. These reforms advocate for more integration of children with disabilities in the "regular" classrooms, but individualized planning, services and instruction are also advocated. Smith (1990) states that if "the IEP



concept, as special education's best thinking, can be incorporated into the dialogue of the REI and the public school organizational debate, the intended individualized nature of 'specially designed instruction' may be recovered," (p. 14).

In order for parents to effect change in the schooling of their children, they must be able to speak out, have the knowledge of what current educational approaches are being taken and what interventions need to be implemented, and have allies in the school system to assist in the induction of change. McNamara (1986) discusses measures an educator can take prior to, during, and after an IEP conference, to facilitate more productive contributions from parents at these meetings. Prior to a conference, the teacher could schedule a meeting with the parents to explain the purpose of a staffing or IEP conference and answer any questions they might have. If a meeting is not possible, then a phone call prior to the conference is recommended. By initiating contact with the parent or parents, the teacher opens the door of communication, mitigates some of the parent's apprehensions, and gives the parent time to think about possible interventions and services they would like their child to receive. Parents should be encouraged to ask for clarification of any unfamiliar terms prior to or during the IEP meeting. If jargon is minimized during the conference then the parent will be less overwhelmed by the data presented. After the conference McNamara suggests that parents are asked to evaluate the meeting "providing the teacher with systematic feedback that [the teacher] can use to improve [his or her] performance and better meet parental needs," (1986, p. 315).

### **Review of Literature**

The research regarding the IEP process has asked the question "Are parents contributors to IEP goals, or merely recipients?" In a study by Turnbull and Hughes (1987), the communicative interactions of parents, educators, and service coordinators at Speech and Language IEP conferences was investigated. Tape recordings of the conferences were obtained and each speaker's utterances were segmented into

Communication Units (CUs), which were analyzed in terms of speaker, topic, and pragmatic intent. The findings of this study revealed the the Clinician (coordinator of services) did most of the talking, (71% of the CUs), whereas the Parent spoke only 15% of the Communication Units. Most of the utterances of the clinician and the parent were statements (93% and 94% respectively), and that a similar number of utterances made by clinicians and parents were questions (7% and 6% respectively). A follow-up telephone survey was conducted to address parental perceptions of the feasibility of the goals established for their child, perceptions of the interactions at the meeting, and perceptions of the meeting in general. The findings presented by Turnbull & Hughes (1987) suggest that most of the conferences concentrated "on the problem instead of on how to remediate the problem, especially the parent's potential role in that remediation," (p. 283). These perceptions suggest that the levels of parental participation noted by Turnbull and Hughes are not those endorsed (at least conceptually) by the special education movement which led to the legal mandate for parent involvement in the IEP process. Clearly, theory and reality tell different stories.

Roush, Harrison, and Palsha (1991) conducted a survey of the attitudes of professionals regarding the parent-professional involvement in the planning and implementing of goals and services for hearing impaired infants and pre-school children. The respondents to this inquiry were mostly teachers or clinicians who had worked professionally for 11 or more years. "Over 95% indicated they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that families require individualized approaches to service delivery, that families should participate as equal partners in the early intervention process, and that facilitating such involvement was appropriate to their professional roles." (Roush et al., 1991, p. 363). Another finding was that when there are incongruities regarding priorities of the parent and of the professionals, the professionals are somewhat reluctant to yield to the parent's wishes. Roush et al. (1991) state "it is not surprising that professionals find it difficult to



remain supportive when they feel that parental choices are inconsistent with what they believe to be best for the child." (p. 364). They suggest that further research consider the parent's perceptions of the services being provided to their children versus the practitioner's perceptions.

Gerber, Banbury, Miller, and Griffin (1986) also queried special educators in regards to their perceptions of parent involvement in the IEP process. The special educators who completed the survey serviced students with varying special needs, including; speech/language disabilities, mental retardation, learning disabilities, physical handicaps, hearing impairments/deafness, gifted, and emotionally disturbances/behavior disorders. A total of 145 respondents from Louisiana, Alabama, West Virginia, Texas, Illinois, and Florida answered a survey about parental participation in the formulation and implementation of IEP goals. The measure of involvement in the IEP process was pilot tested on psychology graduate students, and termed the "IEP opinionnaire". In contrast to Roush et al., Gerber et al. (1986) found that "only slightly more than 50% of the respondents felt that parent participation in IEP formulation had merit," (p. 161). A staggering 71% of respondents felt that "parents should be given the option to waive the requirement of parent participation and place decision making solely in the hands of professionals." (Gerber et al., 1986, p. 161). According to these special education respondents, the IEP meeting is considered merely a formality where the pre-written IEP is presented to the parents. It should be noted that although the Gerber et al. findings are quite contrary to Roush et al., this study utilized the input of a broad variety of special education teachers whereas the Roush et. al. study focused on special education teachers and speech language clinicians for children with hearing impairments. Gerber et al. encourage further research in order to contrast parent perceptions of IEP meetings with those of special educators.

A naturalistic observation of IEP conferences for students with either mild mental

impairments or learning disabilities was conducted by Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1980). Fourteen conferences were video taped and coded using two minute intervals. An analysis of who was speaking, what the topic was, and who was the recipient of the information, was completed by trained raters. The topics discussed at the IEP meetings varied from meeting to meeting but included Curriculum (goals and objectives), Behavior, Performance, Conference Procedures (formalities of meeting), Evaluation, Personal or Family issues, Instructional materials, Placement, Special services, Rights and responsibilities, Health, Future contacts, and Future plans. Goldstein et al. (1980) found that "curriculum, behavior, and performance ranked as the three most frequently discussed areas ... [and] topics such as evaluation, placement, special services, rights and responsibilities, and future contacts [and future plans] received .. little attention," (p. 283). The IEP conferences observed in this study "can generally be characterized as the resource teacher taking the initiative to review the already developed IEP with the parent, who was the primary recipient of the comments made at the conference." (Goldstein et al., 1980, p. 283). A measure of satisfaction with the IEP meeting was obtained from the parents via a questionnaire immediately following the conference. Parents were highly satisfied with the meetings, regardless of factors such as short durations, limited depth of topics, etc.. Goldstein et al. (1980) hypothesize that parents "might have viewed the conference as an increase in communication over what had been experienced with teachers in the past ... They might also have anticipated positively the extra help the child would be receiving," (p. 284).

Minke and Scott (1993) conducted a similar naturalistic study of the development of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP's), the IEP equivalent for non categorical birth to 3 year old programs, in order to determine the role of parents in the process. Three program sites which serviced children with developmental delays as well as at risk students were utilized. Minke and Scott (1993) concluded that "parents have attained

partial decision-making power at these sites, but that greater attention to parent participation is needed in goal setting, assessment, and negotiation," (p. 82). Suggestions are made for encouraging service providers and parents to engage in practices such as collaboration and negotiation in order to best serve the needs of the child. Future research in this area is encouraged.

It is unclear who is expected to take responsibility for encouraging parent involvement. What is the role of the regular education teacher? Is he or she the person responsible for reaching out to parents? Or is the special educator the more likely candidate to involve parents? At the IEP meeting the classroom teacher traditionally has little authority, (Turnbull & Hughes, 1987, Vaughn et al., 1988). If the special educator provides the most information and input at the IEP, then perhaps he or she should initiate more interactions with the parent. Turnbull and Hughes found that the classroom teacher accounted for only 12% of the communicative interactions of the IEP meetings observed in their 1987 study. The special service provider (in this case speech and language clinicians) accounted for the majority of input (71%) most of which (93%) were statements, not questions. Vaughn et al. (1988) asked parents "to specify the number of contacts they had with the school regarding special help their child might need, how the contacts had been made, who had made the contacts, why the contacts had been made, and how they and their spouses had reacted to the contacts," (p. 85). The results indicated that 58% of the contacts had been made by phone, 77% of the contacts had been made by the classroom teacher, 65% of the contacts had been to explain some specific problem, and 42% of the parents were not surprised or knew that their child was having problems. The results of the Vaughn et al. (1988) and Turnbull and Hughes (1987) studies reflect that the majority of home school interactions regarding student difficulties have been initiated by the regular education teacher, while the majority of statements regarding student difficulties at IEP meetings have been made by special educators.

Smith (1990) also discusses the high prevalence of regular educators serving children with special needs and attending IEP meetings, and the low contribution and influence they seem to yield at these conferences. When parents have had more contact with the regular education teacher, the special educator's primary role in the IEP meeting may introduce an obstacle for parent participation in the IEP meetings.

### **Purpose of study**

The literature reviewed in this paper has suggested that parent involvement is still considered a key element of the IEP, yet it seems that in the conferences observed parent participation is not at a level consistent with the intentions of the legislation. The literature has identified that special educators do approximately two thirds or more of the talking in IEP conferences. The participation of regular educators and parents combined accounts for approximately one third of the time of the meeting. However, each of the observational studies reviewed had been completed in the 70's and 80's. Current reform movements such as the Regular Education Initiative may impact the amount of participation from regular educators which in turn may influence parent involvement in the IEP process.

Very few studies have examined specific populations, such as children with hearing impairments. Oftentimes in order to increase the available sample size a variety of disabilities are included in studies of the special education process. By specifying the population served, variables such as early identification, previous special education services, and some socialization factors may be more congruent in this study, than in a sample of parents of children of varying disabilities. This study examines the participation of parents of hearing impaired children at multidisciplinary meetings and their satisfaction with the IEP process. The population of this study consists of parents (or guardians) of hearing impaired children who are seeking special education services through the Eastern Illinois Area Special Education Office, (EIASE). The legal mandate of the parent's

presence at the IEP meeting insures that a representative sample of all parents of hearing impaired children have the potential to be included. The meetings will vary in time and possibly setting because the meeting must be at "an agreeable time and location," according to Public Law 94-142.

### **Definitions & Hypotheses**

The term "verbal participation" is an overt verbal display (making at least a two word utterance during the meeting, asking questions, and/or contributing a goal or objective). Participation levels were recorded by an observer and subjective ratings were made by the parent him/herself. These self ratings will be compared to the observer data (what percentage of the meeting was the parent speaking), and to the parent's perception of satisfaction with his/her child's IEP and the IEP process. Perceived parent involvement levels will also be obtained from the teacher present at the meeting and will be compared to observer and parent data.

The first hypothesis is that parents who verbally participate at the IEP meeting to a greater degree will be more satisfied with their child's completed Individualized Education Plan and the process by which it was created than parents who verbally participate to a lesser degree. This study seeks to link certain activities (verbal participation and perceptions of participation) to the parent's overall satisfaction with the development of goals and special education services for hearing impaired students.

The second hypothesis is that parental education level will be related to parental ratings of satisfaction and the level of verbal participation. Parents who have completed college may have more public speaking experience or may be better able to understand the process than parents who did not finish high school. Also sex differences, marital status, and the age of the parent may be associated with levels of verbal participation.

The third hypothesis is that previous experience with the special education process may be related to levels of verbal participation and ratings of satisfaction. By eliciting



parents of children with hearing impairments, this study can examine variables such as the effect of prior special education services, the effect of placement of the child, and the inclusion of regular educators at IEP meetings. As hearing impairments are often identified in infants and toddlers, parents of hearing impaired elementary and high school students may have years of previous experience with special education services for their children. Placement effects may occur because some of the students with hearing impairments will attend special H.I. classrooms and others will be in "regular" classrooms, but also receive special services.

### **Method**

#### **Subjects**

The subjects of this study are parents of children with hearing impairments who receive special education services in the public schools serviced by the Eastern Illinois Area Special Education Cooperative (EIASE). The coordinator of services for children with hearing impairments who receive services through EIASE provided a schedule of IEP meetings for April and May 1996. The hearing impaired children ranged from 3 to 16 years of age. Twelve of the cases were students who attend self-contained hearing impaired classrooms. Six cases were children included in "regular" classrooms who receive services from an itinerant teacher for students with hearing impairments..

#### **Materials**

Parents and special education teachers attending IEP meetings were given questionnaires which rate perceived parental participation at the meeting, parental satisfaction with the IEP goals, and teacher's ratings of parent involvement. Parents also completed a cover sheet which provided demographic information and answers to open ended questions. A sample cover sheet is attached (Appendix A). The parent involvement questionnaire for the special education teachers contains items from the IEP opinionnaire developed by Gerber et al. (1986), as well as items from the Roush et al. (1991) survey. The questionnaire for the parents contains a sample of items from

Turnbull & Hughes (1987) and Goldstein et al. (1980) used as follow-up measures of satisfaction. Samples of both the teacher and parent questionnaires are attached (Appendix B).

### Procedures

Of twenty possible cases, 18 complete data sets were obtained and used in the analyses, and 19 conferences were observed. A second rater was present at one meeting in order to establish inter rater reliability on the parent participation coding instrument. The agreement among raters was 99%. Thus the raters and instrument were considered reliable. Observers at the IEP meetings recorded the length of the meetings, the number and title of participants present, and duration of parent participation using thirty second intervals. Observers recorded at the end of thirty seconds whether or not the parent or parents verbally participated (utterances of two words or more) during the interval. The criteria of two words was established so that comments such as "yes" and "uh huh" would not be included as participation. The coding instrument was marked as yes or no, if the parent spoke or not. When two or more parents were present an X or Y was used to discriminate between male parent responses and female parent responses. A sample coding sheet is attached (Appendix C). A percentage of participation was determined for each parent or guardian. At the closing of the IEP meeting, parents completed the demographic information and open ended questions such as: Has your child received special services prior to this? Approximately how many questions did you ask at the meeting? and Do you have any additional questions or comments? Ratings of parent involvement completed by the special education teachers at the close of the meeting addressed perceptions of the parent's participation level at the meeting and prior to it, and perceptions of parental satisfaction with the goals and process of the IEP.

The self (and teacher) report method is threatening to the establishment of a relationship between participation and satisfaction because it is based on perceptions. The

survey method alone is prone to errors of interpretation, reactivity, and preconceptions of terms. In order to minimize these effects questionnaires were drawn from those used in previous studies, and observer data allows for a comparison of the actual input of the parent to the ratings made by the parent and teacher.

Parent and special education teacher questionnaires were scored using a 4 point system. Any item marked strongly agree received 4 points, whereas a strongly disagree was 1 point. Some items were reverse scored based on the wording of the question so that all "positive" items were worth more points regardless of whether the respondent agreed or disagreed with the particular statement. An example of this is "The parent was intimidated by the professionals at this IEP meeting." A statement of strongly disagree would mean that the teacher believed that the parent was not intimidated, and thus be considered a "positive" response. The total possible points for the teacher questionnaire was 40, and the total possible for the parent questionnaire was 60 points; a percent score was used in the correlational analysis. Prior to collecting any data the criteria for high and low satisfaction were established by the author. The range of 60 to 46 points for the parent questionnaire (an average item rating of 3 to 4) would be considered highly satisfied. The teacher questionnaire was aimed at the teacher's perception of the parent's comfort level with the meeting and level of parent involvement. Higher ratings (range of 40 -30) indicated that the teacher rated all items as *agree* or *strongly agree* regarding parent involvement in the IEP process. There were 21 respondents to the parent questionnaire and 18 respondents to the teacher questionnaire.

### Results

The length of the IEP conferences ranged from 22 minutes to 75.5 minutes. The average length of a conference was 37.4 minutes. The average number of participants at a conference was 5.3, the range was from 3 to 12 participants. Pearson correlations (See Table 1) indicate a significant ( $p = .05$ ) positive relationship between the number of



participants and the length of the meetings. Meetings with more than 6 participants had an average length of 53.7 minutes, whereas meetings with 6 or fewer participants had an average length of 34.1 minutes. Correlational results indicated that parents' satisfaction ratings were higher for meetings with fewer participants ( $p = .05$ ). The correlation between the child's age and the number of participants was positive and significant ( $p = .01$ ), thus the number of participants at the meetings and consequently the length of the meetings were related to the age of the child. Parent satisfaction ratings decreased as the number of participants and the length of meetings increased. The number of participants and length of the meetings were not significantly correlated with teacher ratings of parental involvement.

TABLE 1

*Correlational Matrix*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	<b>6.</b>	<b>7.</b>	<b>8.</b>	<b>9.</b>
1. Number of Participants	1.0	.565*	-.240	-.525*	.185	.356	.630*	.305	.047
2. Length of Meeting	.565*	1.0	.191	-.344	.357	.181	.134	.127	-.280
3. Verbal Participation	-.240	.191	1.0	.407	.386	.247	-.384	.072	-.532*
4. Parent Satisfaction	-.525*	-.344	.407	1.0	-.121	-.072	-.502*	-.092	-.163
5. Teacher Ratings	.185	.357	.386	-.121	1.0	.005	-.125	-.005	.148
6. Parent Education Level	.356	.181	.247	-.072	.005	1.0	.139	.221	-.501*
7. Child's Age	.630*	.134	-.384	-.502*	-.125	.139	1.0	.094	.012
8. Child's Placement	.305	.127	.072	-.092	-.005	.221	.094	1.0	-.094
9. Sex of Parent	.047	-.280	-.532*	-.163	.148	-.501*	.012	-.094	1.0

Note: \* indicates statistical significance at  $p = .05$

The average percentage of the meeting that a parent spent speaking was 50.1%. The range of verbal participation percentages was from 31% to 81%. When two parents were present their verbal participation was combined as a total parent verbal participation level. The average amount of verbal participation for parents who were males was 24.8%,

and the average amount of verbal participation for female parents was 58.1%. In one case an advocate, who was female, was present whose verbal participation was 32% of the meeting. No data was obtained regarding the verbal participation of each of the other members present at the meeting (special educators, administrators, and regular educators).

Teachers who participated in the study provided the information regarding the placement of each child. Seven children who had less severe hearing losses and one child with a moderate hearing loss were serviced within the mainstream, and ten children with moderate to severe hearing losses attended self-contained classrooms. The placement of the child in either a self contained hearing impaired classroom or in the mainstream with services from the itinerant teacher was not significantly correlated with verbal participation, teacher ratings of parent involvement, parent satisfaction ratings, or any other parent variables. Therefore, the severity of the child's hearing impairment as measured by the placement of self contained or mainstream was not associated with parent satisfaction and participation.

Education levels of the parents were not significantly correlated with other parent variables. Also the marital status and age of the parent was not related to participation or satisfaction levels. A relationship between the sex of the parent and the level of participation was statistically significant (Pearson Correlation  $-.532$ ). Female parents demonstrated higher percentages of participation than males; however, a limited number of males participated in this study ( $n = 5$ ), thus this finding may be inflated.

Parent ratings of satisfaction with the IEP process were overwhelmingly positive, (all items rated as *agree* or *strongly agree*), whereas teacher ratings were not consistently positive. Parent and teacher ratings were not significantly correlated. Nineteen of the twenty one parent respondents demonstrated ratings within the predetermined level of highly satisfied (scores above 45, reflecting agreement on all items) on their questionnaires. Teacher ratings ranged from a low of 19 to a high of 37 out of 40 possible

points. Further analysis of teacher ratings revealed that sixteen special educators rated parental involvement in positive terms, however, five teachers indicated that parental involvement was not at a level commensurate with their expectations. Table 2 illustrates the questions and answers to the teacher questionnaire.

**TABLE 2*****Teacher responses recorded in frequencies of agreement/disagreement.***

Question	SA	A	D	SD
1. Parents should be given the option to waive their right of attendance at IEP meetings.	0	0	10	8
2. IEP's written prior to meetings are detrimental to parent participation.	0	1	17	0
3. The parent made a significant contribution to the IEP process.	9	4	3	1
4. The parent was intimidated by the professionals at this IEP meeting.	0	2	5	11
5. The parent was intimidated by the process of the IEP meeting.	0	1	7	10
6. Parents should attend a district-sponsored IEP orientation meeting prior to the conference.	1	11	6	0
7. The IEP conference is merely a formality, not a session of inquiry and parental involvement.	1	4	6	7
8. The parent at this meeting asked an appropriate number of questions.	4	8	5	1
9. The parent seemed to understand the answers provided for him/her.	7	8	0	1
10. The parent has met or talked to me on several occasions regarding concerns about his/her child.	7	5	1	3

Teacher responses varied on items addressing the adequacy of parental contributions, the parent's comfort level in the meeting, their understanding of the process, and the formality of the meeting. Twenty-eight percent of the educators present at the meetings observed *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the IEP meeting was merely a formality and not a session of inquiry and parental involvement. The number of questions asked by the parent was rated as inadequate by 33% of the educators queried. On the other hand 67% of the teachers stated that the parent has met or talked to the teacher regarding their child on several occasions.

An analysis of parent reported information from short answer questions addressing their familiarity with special education services and estimates of their involvement in the meeting provided some insight into parent perceptions of their involvement in the process. Parents were asked what was done to prepare for the meeting, how many questions they asked, and how long their child has received services. As these responses were often vague a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis was appropriate. Only 29% of the parents surveyed reported preparing for the IEP. Fourteen percent of parents reported active types of preparation such as; attending parent information classes, meeting with the teacher, and consulting a child advocate. Fifteen percent reported more passive types of preparation such as reading last year's report, observing the child at home, and scheduling the meeting. Forty three percent of the parents indicated that they did not do anything to prepare for the meeting, and 28% left the item blank. By assigning the parent responses into three categories, active preparation, passive preparation and no preparation, a post hoc correlational analysis of parent reported preparation levels with verbal preparation, teacher ratings of parent involvement, and parental satisfaction ratings was completed. A positive relationship (Pearson correlation of .464 at  $p = .05$ ) was found between the level of reported preparation and the teacher ratings of parent involvement. No other variables were significantly correlated with parent reported preparation levels. When asked if they contributed a goal for their child, most respondents said yes, but few elaborated as to what the goal was. The examiner was unable to compare the number of actual goals contributed to the reported number. The actual number of questions asked by the parents was eliminated from the coding instrument in order to facilitate a more accurate representation of the number of minutes a parent was speaking. Therefore a comparison between the reported number of questions asked and the actual number of questions asked could not be completed. Each of the twenty-one parents reported that they had attended IEP or MDC meetings prior to the one observed. Eleven parents provided vague answers



or did not respond to the question regarding the number of years their child has received services. Responses varied from 12 months to 3 or 4 years to since third grade. Precise numbers were not provided which prevented statistical analysis of the impact of prior experience.

### **Discussion**

The three hypotheses were not supported by the results. Parent satisfaction and participation were not significantly linked. Satisfaction levels of parents may be impacted by factors other than verbal participation at IEP meetings. Since most parents rated their satisfaction with their child's program and the IEP process very highly, a "ceiling effect" for satisfaction may have interfered with associations between satisfaction and other variables. Most parents indicated that they contributed goals and thought they had asked many questions during the meetings. Perhaps their perception of participation may have influenced their satisfaction. Specific characteristics such as sex, age, education level and marital status were recorded in order to determine the impact of these variables on participation. Female parents were significantly linked to higher levels of participation, however, a limited number of males participated in the study. The current sample indicates that the sex of the parent may impact participation levels, however, factors such as the sex of the teachers or other members present may also have an impact on participation. Further research regarding sex differences is necessary to support this finding. No other distinguishing parent characteristics impacted the level of participation. In contrast, the number of persons present at the meeting and the child's age were clearly related to parent satisfaction and participation levels. The child's age was negatively correlated with parent satisfaction ratings. Parents of older children indicated more years of experience with the special education process than parents of younger children. It is possible that previous experience has a negative impact on satisfaction levels; however, too many intervening variables impeded statistical comparisons. Correlational analyses

indicated no significant effect of severity of impairment as determined by the placement of the child in self contained or mainstream classes.

For this limited sample, the results indicated three main trends: 1) The number of participants at meetings is associated with longer meetings; 2) longer meetings were associated with less verbal participation by parents; and 3) active parental preparation was associated with higher teacher ratings of parental involvement. It is logical that a meeting of twelve people will take longer than a meeting of three people. It is also logical that meetings with more people may influence the percentage of participation of any single member. In the conferences observed, it appeared that the meetings of more than six people tended to follow a turn-taking procedure, where as smaller groupings were more interactive. Further investigation of the influence of the number of persons present at special education staffings on a larger scale would be beneficial in supporting these findings.

The age of the child had an interesting impact on the results obtained. Older children tended to have more people present at their meetings, the meetings tend to be longer, the parents tended to participate less, and the parent ratings tended to be lower. Younger children tended to have shorter meetings and higher parent ratings. Each of the meetings brought unique interpersonal dynamics to light. The differences between each meeting must be carefully analyzed in order to be meaningful. For example, the size and length of the meetings for the younger children may have been more conducive to parent participation, or there may have been a difference in the communicative and personality styles of early childhood and primary level teachers versus elementary and middle school level teachers. Further analysis of what impacted teacher ratings could provide insight into the factors influencing parent participation and perceptions of satisfaction.

Teacher ratings of parent involvement and satisfaction demonstrated a significant positive correlation with parent reports of preparation prior to the meeting. It was noted

that more overt types of participation involved the teacher or resulted in the addition of a child advocate to the IEP meeting. Parents who more actively prepared for the IEP meetings by collaborating with a teacher or child advocate may be perceived by teachers as more involved and more satisfied with the special education process.

Parent satisfaction, as measured in the current study, did not appear to be influenced by levels of verbal participation or preparation. This finding is consistent with the literature (Goldstein et al, 1980), suggesting that parents may feel satisfied with the services and goals of their child's program regardless of their participation in the development of that plan. Teacher's perceptions of parent involvement and satisfaction was related to overt preparation by the parent, but not by overt verbal participation at the IEP meeting. This suggests that parent involvement ratings are influenced by something other than verbal participation levels, and may be more influenced by actions prior to the meeting.

Twenty-eight percent of the special education teachers queried agreed with the Gerber et al. (1986) results that IEP meetings are merely a formality and that parents do not significantly contribute to the process. One third of the teachers also *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* to the statement "the parent at this meeting asked and appropriate number of questions." Also 33% of the educators disagreed with the statement "the parent has met or talked to me on several occasions regarding concerns about his/her child." The reported teacher perceptions of parental involvement appear to indicate a desire for more communication between home and school. As regular educators did not complete this parent involvement inventory, a comparison in future studies of special educators and regular educators perceptions of parental involvement would provide insight regarding levels of home-school communication.

The range of verbal participation for parents at the conferences observed was from 31% to 81%. This contrasts with Turnbull and Hughes (1987) finding of parents

accounting for only 15% of all communication units at speech/language IEP meetings. The 1987 Turnbull and Hughes study did not provide information regarding the percentage of time of the meeting in which the parent was speaking, only the percentage of communication units defined as "words that convey a single semantic meaning and can stand alone," (p. 277). Parent's levels of verbal participation in the current study were at least one third of the meeting or more. It appears that parents in the current study provided higher levels of verbal input than has been indicated previously in the literature. Further inquiry regarding verbal participation of parents at special education conferences for children with varying handicapping conditions is necessary to verify whether parental participation has increased in the last ten years.

#### **Limitations of current study**

The sample population of this study is small and specific, so the results are applicable to parents of hearing impaired children who are receiving special education services through EIASE. The size of the data sample available seriously limits the level of significance and generalizability of this study. The results obtained with parents of hearing impaired children provide general trends and tend to support previous research findings (Gerber et al, 1986, Goldstein et al, 1980). This data may not apply to children attending public schools in other areas, private academies or institutions for the deaf. The mandatory attendance of parents at IEP meetings lends more strength to the representativeness of this sample, however the overall sample size is quite limited.

The results obtained were also impacted by the limited number of male respondents, as well as few variations in race, age, and socioeconomic status. The sample obtained consisted mostly of married white/caucasian women with high school or higher education. In addition the short answer questions listed on the cover sheet yielded a range of vague responses which were difficult to analyze. Many of the questions could be changed into choices which would provide more exact data. By providing options, the



respondents may answer more questions rather than leaving them blank, and would furnish more accurate and testable data.

The data obtained reflects parents verbally participated during one third or more of the IEP meetings they attended. This finding may be an increase in verbal participation from previous studies; however, the current study utilized a time sampling method, and a direct comparison from the literature is not available. Turnbull and Hughes (1987) provided percentages of verbal participation in terms of communication units, not in terms of percentages of time. If the current study had utilized tape recorders, further analysis may have been completed using identical procedures as the 1987 Turnbull and Hughes study.

The deliberate sampling for heterogeneity uses a defined target class of persons across settings and times to ensure that a wide range of possibilities are represented. In this study the target population was parents of hearing impaired children receiving special education services through EIASE. These findings are specific to parents of children with hearing impairments and may not generalize to parents of children with other types of disabilities. The specificity of the impairment may influence the types of services a child may receive, the social acceptability of the child in the school and community, and the level of home-school involvement. The children from this study attended public schools and maintained contact with hearing peers and adults, thus, these findings may not generalize to hearing impaired students attending special institutions for the deaf. These results are specific to parents in this geographic location, however the participants are representative of parents seeking special education services for their hearing impaired children through EIASE. Future comparison of parent participation and satisfaction in other geographical locations as well as parents of hearing impaired children who attend private facilities is suggested.

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions or mark the most appropriate response.

I am ☐ male ☐ female

I am 18-24 25-32 33-40 41-47 48+.

My child is ☐ male ☐ female

My child is \_\_\_\_\_ years old

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Education completed self spouse

My marital status is

Less than High school

☐ Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced

High school or GED

My child's ethnicity is

College (2 yrs)

☐ White ☐ African American

College (4 yrs)

☐ Asian ☐ Hispanic Other \_\_\_\_\_

Masters or other

Do you have other children? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes how many? \_\_\_\_\_

Does anyone else in the family have a hearing problem? \_\_\_ Please list the person's relationship to the child \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known that your child has a hearing problem? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have other children receiving specialized services? \_\_\_\_\_

Has your child received specialized services prior to this? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how long has your child been receiving services? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this the first time you are attending an IEP or MDC meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how long (in minutes) was the meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many questions did you ask at the meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you contribute a goal for your child? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your role in your child's specialized program? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any additional questions or comments? \_\_\_\_\_

What, if anything did you do to prepare for this IEP meeting?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

Please circle the most appropriate response the the following statements.

<b>TEACHER</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disa
1. Parents should be given the option to waive their right of attendance at IEP meetings.	SA	A	D	SD
2. IEP's written prior to meetings are detrimental to parent participation.	SA	A	D	SD
3. The parent made a significant contribution to the IEP process.	SA	A	D	SD
4. The parent was intimidated by the professionals at this IEP meeting.	SA	A	D	SD
5. The parent was intimidated by the process of the IEP meeting.	SA	A	D	SD
6. Parents should attend a district-sponsored IEP orientation meeting prior to the conference.	SA	A	D	SD
7. The IEP conference is merely a formality, not a session of inquiry and parental involvement.	SA	A	D	SD
8. The parent at this meeting asked an appropriate number of questions.	SA	A	D	SD
9. The parent seemed to understand the answers provided for him/her.	SA	A	D	SD
10. The parent has met or talked to me on several occasions regarding concerns about his/her child.	SA	A	D	SD

Please estimate the number of questions the parent asked at the meeting. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

Please circle the most appropriate response the the following statements.

### **PARENT**

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. My child will be able to accomplish the IEP goals established for him/her.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 2. I am completely satisfied with the program that was established for my child today.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 3. I am comfortable with the amount of time that my child will be receiving services.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 4. The IEP goals written for my child make sense to me.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 5. I have a better understanding of my child as a result of the IEP meeting.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 6. My time at the meeting was well spent.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 7. All of my questions were answered at the meeting.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 8. I would like more information about what I can do for my child at home.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 9. I feel my presence at the meeting was necessary.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 10. I feel I have a definite responsibility in reaching the IEP goals.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 11. I feel that the IEP meeting is the appropriate place for me to discuss any concerns I have about my child's educational plan.            | SA   A   D   SD |
| 12. I feel comfortable contacting my child's teacher at any time to discuss any concerns I have.   | SA   A   D   SD |
| 13. I feel that an individual conference with my child's teacher would be a more appropriate way to learn about my child's educational plan. | SA   A   D   SD |
| 14. I talk to my child's teachers on a regular basis.  | SA   A   D   SD |
| 15. I am satisfied with the quality of my child's education.   | SA   A   D   SD |

## Appendix C

## Conference Summary Form

Start time \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Participants \_\_\_\_\_

### Initial or Re-evaluation

End time \_\_\_\_\_

Name of observer \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant info:** \_\_\_\_\_

Using thirty second intervals record whether or not the parent or guardian present was speaking (Yes or No).

**(ex)1:00 No**

[illegible][illegible][illegible]